

CALENDAR ITEM

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**CONSIDER ADOPTION OF A RESOLUTION COMMEMORATING
THE AMIGOS DE BOLSA CHICA FOR 40 YEARS OF ADVOCACY
TO SAVE, PRESERVE, AND RESTORE THE BOLSA CHICA WETLANDS;
AND AN INFORMATIONAL REPORT ON THE 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATION OF THE OCEAN INLET OPENING AT THE
BOLSA CHICA LOWLANDS RESTORATION PROJECT IN ORANGE COUNTY**

BACKGROUND:

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Amigos de Bolsa Chica. The Amigos de Bolsa Chica is a nonprofit volunteer organization formed by a group of residents in 1976 to protect the Bolsa Chica wetlands from development. Its mission is to advocate for the preservation, restoration, and maintenance of Bolsa Chica by encouraging public acquisition of all the wetlands and sufficient surrounding open spaces to create a viable ecosystem and to provide education about the importance of coastal wetlands. Recognizing the Amigos de Bolsa Chica is especially appropriate as the 10th anniversary of the opening of the new ocean inlet approaches on August 24.

Historically, thousands of acres of highly productive saltwater and freshwater marshes extended from Anaheim Bay to the Huntington Beach bluffs, including 2,700 acres of the Bolsa Chica Lowlands. These wetlands were a vital part of the coastal ecosystem and were used extensively by native and migrating birds, as nursery areas for juvenile marine fishes and by Native Americans. Today, 90 percent of California's historic coastal wetlands have been lost, primarily due to development.

In the 1940s, oil production began in Bolsa Chica and oil drilling rigs dominated the area. In 1973, the Commission acquired about 330 acres in Bolsa Chica through a settlement agreement. By 1976, when the Amigos de Bolsa Chica was formed, several development plans were being pursued for the privately-owned Lowlands areas, including large residential development areas. Since then, the Amigos de Bolsa Chica volunteers have worked tirelessly and collaboratively with state, federal and local governments and others to protect the Bolsa Chica Lowlands from development.

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Beginning in the 1970s, the Commission began collaborating with the Amigos de Bolsa Chica to preserve and restore the wetlands. In 1996, the Commission entered into an interagency agreement with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (formerly Department of Fish and Game), Coastal Conservancy, the Natural Resources Agency (formerly the Resources Agency), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to purchase additional land and plan, design, construct, and maintain the Project as mitigation for impacts from the new terminal facilities for the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. The ports contributed a total of \$101.4 million to the Project in exchange for mitigation credits.

Between 1996 and 2005, the Commission acquired about 950 additional acres in the Bolsa Chica Lowlands, bringing public ownership to more than 1,200 acres. Restoration of the severely degraded wetlands began in 2004, and the majority of the first phase of restoration Project was completed in 2006. Commission staff, along with the agency partners, continue to oversee and manage the Project today. A second phase must wait until the operating oilfield reaches the end of its economic life.

As a result of these collaborative efforts, after more than 100 years, a new tidal inlet opened in 2006, restoring tidal influence to the Bolsa Chica Project wetlands, creating new habitat for a variety of vegetative, invertebrate, fish, and avian species, including 22 endangered and sensitive species, and providing a valuable public resource. This Project, the result of decades of planning and cooperation by the public and government agencies, is the largest coastal wetland restoration in Southern California history.

Ten years of post-restoration monitoring has shown that the wetlands has meaningfully increased the availability of bay habitat, improving southern California fishery resources. The Project provides habitat for 65 fish species, including nursery habitat for spawning and juvenile fish, as well as commercially important species such as California halibut and white seabass. Extensive eelgrass meadows support resident fish species, provide egg-laying substrate, and protection for breeding species.

The Bolsa Chica Project wetlands is a critical stop for migrating shorebirds on the Pacific Flyway, and provides foraging habitat for over 70 avian species. With the introduction of tidal influence, the mudflats created by the restoration provide a rich invertebrate community of over 55 marine species and a good food source to these birds. Over 10,000 shorebirds have been observed on the restored

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mudflats during a single survey. The project created three nesting sites for the threatened Western Snowy Plover and endangered California Least Tern, and has been designated a Critical Habitat for the Western Snowy Plover. Green sea turtles forage within the tidal wetlands, and the California sealions occasionally enter to feed on fish.

In addition to providing a valuable ecological resource, the Bolsa Chica Lowlands today also provide a valuable public resource. Educational groups, non-profit organizations and the general public frequent the site throughout the year to learn about wetland habitats, photograph wildlife, hike or fish in designated areas, and enjoy the wetland open space. With 20 access points and 2 adjacent parking lots, as many as 400 members of the general public access the wetlands on any given day. Special events and organizations such as the Amigos de Bolsa Chica provide additional educational and public out-reach programs throughout the year, bringing an estimated public visitation of more than 80,000 people per year to the Bolsa Chica Lowlands.

The 10-Year Anniversary event, commemorating the completion of the first phase of the Project restoration and the opening of the ocean inlet, will be hosted by the Commission on August 24, 2016, at the Bolsa Chica wetlands Project site. There will be a brief presentation including guest speakers, and refreshments. A video presentation will follow at the Huntington Beach library sponsored by the Amigos de Bolsa Chica, on the history of the Bolsa Chica.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION:

The opening of the tidal inlet in 2006 brought to fruition the vision, hard work and collaboration of the Amigos de Bolsa Chica. Today, the wetlands stand as an outstanding example of citizen advocacy, commitment, and spirited volunteerism. The Amigos de Bolsa Chica have commemorated their 40th anniversary with several events throughout the year, including a Recognition of Achievement at the Huntington Beach City Hall, the film premiere "Saving the Bolsa Chica Wetlands," and a Science Symposium at the Huntington Beach Library. The Amigos de Bolsa Chica continue to provide ongoing public outreach, educational programs and tours and to promote the long-term sustainability of the Bolsa Chica wetlands. Without the Amigo de Bolsa Chica's countless hours of dedication and service, these historic wetlands would probably not have been preserved and made accessible to the public.

THE FUTURE OF BOLSA CHICA:

Nearly all of the biological benefits of the restoration are a result of introducing daily tidal influence from the ocean. As with most human-made wetlands, the

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inlet requires maintenance to remove sand accumulation and ensure connectivity with the ocean. It is critical that the tremendous investment of time and money, and resulting biological successes, be protected by continuing inlet maintenance, water control, and adaptive management.

The greatest challenge the Bolsa Chica wetlands Project faces today is a lack of sufficient funding for long-term management, including dredging required to maintain the ocean inlet. Insufficient long-term funding is a situation seen regionally, as most of the major coastal wetland restoration projects in southern California move into the long-term maintenance and sustainability phase. The dredging for the management of inlet sand accumulation, while contemplated in the original design, has proven to be the most significant cost. Annual dredging is approximately \$1.5 million, in addition to other operational costs.

The initial fund for long-term management costs of \$15 million is nearly depleted due to record low investment returns and unanticipated adaptive management costs necessary to maintain the success of the wetland. Annual operational costs average between \$1.5 and \$2 million, including required tidal inlet dredging, costs for the on-site California Department of Fish and Wildlife manager and staff, capital costs and habitat management activities. The Project is now threatened by insufficient funding to manage the system, with reserve account balances for current operations approximately \$2.8 million.

Without augmented funding for future maintenance of the Bolsa Chica Project wetlands, funding will be depleted in a few years leading to the potential failure of the restoration, and a significant loss to California's goal of restoring our coastal wetlands, and of "no net loss" of existing wetlands, as well as the loss of a valuable statewide public resource.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

1. This action is consistent with Strategy 1.2.4 of the Commission's Strategic Plan to prioritize the use of sovereign lands, where appropriate, for open space, wetlands, riparian habitat and habitat preservation, restoration, and enhancement, including through habitat management plans, mitigation agreements with public agencies, private parties, and other conservation efforts, consistent with applicable law.
2. Additional information on the Bolsa Chica Lowlands Project can be found on the Commission's website at http://www.slc.ca.gov/Projects/Bolsa_Chica.html.

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3. The adoption of a resolution is not a project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act because it is an administrative action that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Authority: Public Resources Code section 21065 and California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15378, subdivision (b)(5).

EXHIBIT:

- A. Resolution Commemorating the Amigos de Bolsa Chica

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

It is recommended that the Commission:

Adopt the resolution in substantially the form attached hereto as Exhibit A.



Resolution

BY THE CALIFORNIA STATE LANDS COMMISSION COMMEMORATING THE AMIGOS de BOLSA CHICA

FOR ITS 40 YEARS OF PUBLIC SERVICE TO SAVE, PRESERVE AND RESTORE THE BOLSA CHICA IN ORANGE COUNTY

WHEREAS, once part of a 165,000-acre Spanish land grant, the Bolsa Chica in Orange County now consists of approximately 1,400 acres of undeveloped coastal wetland and adjacent upland areas; and,

WHEREAS, for tens of thousands of years, the Bolsa Chica wetlands were sustained by both seawater and freshwater, and during rising tides it was flooded by seawater through a natural ocean inlet; and,

WHEREAS, in 1900, the tidal nature of the wetland was destroyed when the natural ocean inlet to the wetland was closed to improve duck hunting—since then, the area was used for agriculture, cattle grazing, military coastal artillery emplacements and oil production; and,

WHEREAS, by the 1970s, despite its severe degradation because of being cut off from the ocean for 70 years and existing as an oil field for 30 years, the Bolsa Chica still sustained wetland species; and,

WHEREAS, in 1976, gravely concerned about the loss of coastal wetlands and plant and bird habitat, a group of local volunteers formed the Amigos de Bolsa Chica to protect, preserve and acquire the valuable Bolsa Chica and surrounding open space, restore Bolsa Chica to its natural marsh wetland state, and educate the public about the importance of wetlands to the natural ecosystem; and,

WHEREAS, in 1973, the California State Lands Commission acquired approximately 330 acres in the Bolsa Chica Lowlands, and by 2005, through the collaborative efforts of the Amigos de Bolsa Chica and others, acquired an additional 950 acres of land bringing public ownership of the Bolsa Chica Lowlands to more than 1,200 acres; and,

WHEREAS, the groundbreaking Bolsa Chica wetlands restoration that started in 2004 is the largest coastal wetland restoration undertaken in Southern California; and,

WHEREAS, the public acquisition of Bolsa Chica and the historic wetlands restoration were possible because of the Amigos de Bolsa Chica volunteers, who include retirees, teachers, engineers, scientists, photographers, artists, business owners and others, and they are to be commended for energetically and successfully championing environmental and wetlands preservation and restoration at Bolsa Chica and for their altruistic dedication to volunteerism; and,

WHEREAS, without the efforts of the Amigos de Bolsa Chica, the Bolsa Chica Lowlands would most likely include an exclusive marina surrounded by waterfront homes instead of an exemplary coastal wetlands restoration, and,

WHEREAS, the Amigos de Bolsa Chica overcame daunting challenges to succeed in their mission to help save and restore approximately 1,200 acres of imperiled wetlands, and the Amigos de Bolsa Chica are an inspiration to all; and,

WHEREAS, the panoply of the Amigos de Bolsa Chica’s achievements over the past 40 years are too numerous to name, and their spirit and advocacy are a model for others; and,

WHEREAS, the Amigos de Bolsa Chica are to be commended for 40 years of diligent volunteerism to save, preserve, and restore the Bolsa Chica coastal wetlands; and,

WHEREAS, the State Lands Commission, the principal state entity responsible for managing tide and submerged lands in California and safeguarding Public Trust lands and resources, has benefitted enormously from the Amigos de Bolsa Chica’s outstanding efforts, as have the people of California and its environment; now therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the California State Lands Commission that it express its sincere appreciation and deep gratitude to the Amigos de Bolsa Chica for their exemplary civic service to the environment and the people of California; and,

RESOLVED, that the Commission’s Executive Officer transmit copies of this resolution to the Amigos de Bolsa Chica, to Senator Janet Nguyen, Assembly Member Travis Allen, and the Mayor of Huntington Beach, Jim Katapodis.

I hereto set my hand and have caused the Seal of the California State Lands Commission to be affixed on this 9th day of August, Two Thousand and Sixteen.

The Honorable Betty T. Yee, *Chair*
California State Lands Commission
State Controller

The Honorable Gavin Newsom, *Member*
California State Lands Commission
Lieutenant Governor

The Honorable Michael Cohen, *Member*
California State Lands Commission
Director, Department of Finance